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REPORT

OF A

COMMITTEE

OF THE

CONNECTICUT MEDICAL SOCIETY,

RESPECTING

AN ASYLUM FOR INEBRIATES,

WITH

THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE SOCIETY,

ADOPTED

AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,

MAY, 1830.

NEW HAVEN:

PRINTED BY HEZEKIAH HOWE.

1830.

THE Committee appointed by the *Connecticut Medical Society*, to inquire whether it is expedient and practicable to establish an institution for the reformation of intemperate persons, having attended to the duty assigned them, submit the following

REPORT.

The propriety of making any provision for inebriates might well be questioned, if intemperance was not a misfortune as well as a crime—if the lover of strong drink, who scatters desolation over the fair prospects of his household, was not himself the victim of wretchedness from which he would gladly escape. The members of this society need not be told, that intemperance is commonly associated with disease of body or mind—and although the disease is aggravated, and probably occasioned by vicious habits, those very habits are adhered to, because they are thought to yield momentary relief from suffering. We believe there are few drunkards who would not, in their hours of sobriety, wish to be reclaimed—few, who would not wish to regain that rank in society, from which, by their vicious conduct, they have been so deeply degraded. But, however ardently they may desire their own reformation, they have not the moral courage and the needful resolution to effect it. Their disease excites no sympathy; their sufferings call forth no pity from others; their consciences and their friends reproach them; their good resolutions fail them, and their promises of reformation are made only to be broken.

Under these circumstances, it becomes us to inquire whether the evil is not of so much importance as to demand the corrective aid of government, and the untiring efforts of benevolent individuals to effect its removal.

Civilians assure us that ignorance and vice are the only formidable enemies of our republic. Observation assures us, that intemperance is the great avenue to

these sources of national calamity; that the child is rarely brought up in ignorance, unless one or the other of its parents is intemperate; and that few persons are convicted of grosser crimes till they have become intemperate themselves. It unfortunately happens, from the facility with which ardent spirits may be procured, and the latitude which every one assumes for the government of his own actions, that intemperance has become not only a source of national danger, but emphatically a national vice. It is moreover an evil whose contaminating influence extends from house to house, and from one individual to another, till it has corrupted the whole population of a neighborhood, and ruined those who should have been its ornaments. It often happens too, that inebriates are possessed of uncommon vivacity and fascinating address, which render them interesting—and in proportion as they are interesting, dangerous associates. One individual of this character has been often known to seduce an extensive circle of unsuspecting companions into habits of intemperance, from which it is difficult, if not impossible, to reclaim them. We profess not to be able to estimate the extent of the evil which such an individual may entail upon his country—our object being to determine how such calamities may be avoided. By the existing laws of the state, if a person is guilty of intemperance, he may be sent to a work-house for punishment. There he is looked upon as a criminal—his associates are criminals, some of them guilty of heinous offences—and instead of being reclaimed, he is usually made worse. Being associated with companions who have lost all self-respect, and all regard for the opinions of others, he is by their companionship prepared for the commission of gross crimes, and consequently returns a more dangerous member of the community.

This is no picture of imaginary evil, but a statement which every day's observation proves to be literally true. Whenever an attempt has been made to effect a reformation of an intemperate person through the agency of legal penalties, he has become more degraded and more desperate. In consequence of these difficul-

ties, few efforts are made to reform the drunkard ; and of these, but a very small proportion are crowned with success. The institution of Temperance Societies, which have produced a most desirable change in the opinions and practice of others, has not served, and indeed was not designed, to brighten the faint prospect of his restoration. Neglected by those societies, and shunned by those who are most ardently engaged in promoting the cause of temperance, he chooses for his companions those who have already entered upon the same unfortunate career with himself, and pledges a faithful adherence to them and their practices. There never was a time when greater or more successful efforts were made to *prevent* the extension of this vice, and we are compelled to believe, there never was so faint a prospect of the drunkard's forsaking his companions or his cup, or when efforts directed to his preservation were more imperiously demanded. If any one is disposed to question the correctness of these observations, we would request him to examine the records of our criminal courts, and he will find that the expenditures for public prosecutions have been greatly augmented, and that convictions for crimes of almost every grade have become more numerous than at any former period.

The question then recurs, shall inebriates be permitted to pursue their unhappy career, without an effort to restrain and correct them ? or shall they be subjected to such penal discipline as has been proved positively injurious to its subjects, and ultimately detrimental to society ? Whenever these inquiries have been directed to intelligent, public spirited and benevolent men, an unqualified negative answer has been returned. The existing practice of our state is alike impolitic and cruel, and we proceed to point out a more judicious course, confidently believing it entitled to individual and legislative patronage.

Before attempting to eradicate any disease, we should endeavor to investigate its character, to inquire into its nature and tendency, and ascertain as far as practicable, the impediments which exist to its removal.

This course we shall attempt to follow, on the present occasion. The use of intoxicating liquor is at first resorted to, for the temporary but pleasurable excitation which it produces. This excitement is soon followed by feelings of lassitude and dejection, which are sometimes sufficiently distressing to deter the subject of them from a second exposure to their influence. If not, the excitement is again sought for—the consequent lassitude and dejection are again experienced, and the practice is reiterated, till at length ardent spirits are considered the only refuge from the irksome feelings which they have created.

In this manner, the practice of intemperance is usually commenced, and it is continued but a short time, before the energies of the constitution are impaired, and the system becomes diseased. Under these circumstances, our efforts to reclaim the inebriate will be of doubtful utility; we may urge upon him the most powerful arguments in favor of abstinence, and the most earnest dissuasives from intemperance; but our arguments will be in vain. We may appeal to past experience, to present wretchedness, and to future degradation; but our appeal will not reach the conscience, or check the wayward career of him for whom it was intended. Nor does the influence of those excellent societies which have been established for the purpose of preserving what may well be termed the *ark of our country's safety*—the temperate habits of the rising generation, extend to the dwelling of him who is already intemperate. The reformation of such a person cannot be expected, unless he is restrained from the use of intoxicating liquors till his health is restored, his morals are improved, and his principles so established, as to induce him ever afterwards to reject their use. From these considerations, it appears that no measures calculated to check the career of the intemperate, will be efficient, till we have an *Institution*, furnished with whatever is necessary for their maintenance and employment.

Where they shall be subjected to salutary discipline, and needful restraint.

Where they shall have no access to intoxicating liquors.

Where they shall be constantly and usefully employed.

Where they shall not be contaminated by evil associates, and where they shall have no opportunity of exerting an unfavorable influence upon others.

Where they shall receive whatever medical aid is necessary to restore their debilitated constitutions—to relieve the sufferings occasioned by past habits of intemperance, and to eradicate the strong but artificial propensity, which they may have acquired for indulgence in the use of inebriating drink.

Where they shall receive the benefit of moral precepts, correct examples, and such instruction as will induce them permanently to abandon their former vicious courses, and prepare them for the performance of those long neglected duties, which they owe to others and to themselves.

Where, in short, by an enlightened system of physical and moral treatment, they may be reformed; and whence, if reformed, they may be restored, welcome guests of their families, and useful members of society.

In estimating the benefits which would result from such an establishment, we ought candidly to examine the evils which it is intended to correct, and to compare the expense which must be incurred, with the advantages which will result from its successful operation.

Intemperance is the great avenue to pauperism and crime.

The State of Connecticut annually pays twenty thousand dollars, and the several towns in the State unquestionably pay ten thousand dollars more, for the prosecution of offenders, whose crimes may be traced to intemperance.

The State also pays from five to ten thousand dollars a year for the support of paupers, and the several towns pay not less than thirty thousand dollars for a similar object. The amount paid for the maintenance of insane persons in this State, cannot be less than

twenty thousand dollars annually, one third of which, according to official documents, which have been published in New York and Philadelphia, is occasioned by indulgence in the use of intoxicating liquors. Our citizens are, therefore, annually required to pay 70,000 dollars for the relief of those misfortunes, and the suppression of those crimes, which are occasioned by intemperance. No one who has carefully watched the progress of the inebriate from respectability to dishonor, to pauperism and crime, can for a moment doubt, but it would be essentially diminished by the contemplated institution.

The amount annually paid for ardent spirits, the time devoted to revelry, and the languor and idleness which follow in the train of dissipation, constitute important items of expense, which we leave for others to calculate. By this convention no such estimate will be required: but if each member will form an opinion from his own personal observation, and state what might be annually saved, within the range of his professional practice, by removing drunkards from the haunts of dissipation to a quiet, well regulated establishment, where they should be made to earn their livelihood, he would furnish us with arguments which can neither be gainsaid nor refuted.

But the institution which we recommend will save what is more valuable than money; it will rescue many individuals from destruction—many families from destitution—and wipe a foul blot from the fair fame and good character of our State. Nay more, it will be an honor to that State, and with those other excellent charities which have been established for the restoration of health and reason, for the instruction of mutes, and for the suppression of “wickedness and vice,” it will continue to diffuse blessings over our land, long after its founders shall have slept in the dust.

This committee would gladly present to the medical society some calculations relative to the expense of the proposed establishment—but, it is thought better to refer the subject, without observation, to the decision of its patrons. We believe that land sufficient for culti-

vation, and buildings for the accommodation of at least one hundred persons, may be procured for twelve thousand dollars, and that those charitable citizens of our State who have always been active in the cause of benevolence, will pay one half of that sum. We may then look with confidence to the legislature, for whatever else is necessary to complete this noble work.

We need say nothing respecting the domestic arrangements of the institution, except, that it must be entirely devoted to the cause of industry and temperance. Much of its success will depend upon the character of the person to whose charge it is entrusted. In him must be found a combination of rare and excellent qualities, which will secure the affection as well as the respect, of those who are to be reformed by his exertions. He must, himself, be a pattern of industry and temperance, in order to induce others to practice temperance, and to pursue industriously whatever they may be required to perform. In him, dignity must be combined with cheerfulness—energy with mildness, and firmness with forbearance. His moral character, and his moral precepts must be of that elevated standard, which will secure the confidence of the public, as well as the respect of those who are committed to his charge.

With such a superintendent, the institution would support itself. With such a guide, an unfortunate class of our fellow men, who at present earn nothing, enjoy nothing, and hope for nothing, would be led from their wayward career into the paths of rectitude and virtue.

To such a plan it would hardly be reasonable to expect opposition—and yet opposition should not excite the least surprize, since every scheme of benevolence, whether designed for the mitigation of suffering, or the extension of happiness, has, in the onset, been regarded as visionary, rejected as useless, or denounced as an unauthorized encroachment upon the established customs of the world. From physicians, however, who are in the habit of forming their opinions after mature deliberation, it will be sure to receive that degree of favor to which it is entitled. The only serious objection to

the success of such a scheme, is that it will require a slight modification of existing laws. Instead of sending a drunkard to a work-house for punishment, we would have him sent to an asylum for reformation; and instead of thirty days' confinement, we would require him to devote at least a year to the great and important work of reformation.

In the course of that time, he should be taught to live without ardent spirits; to live in habits of industry; to earn at least his own livelihood; and in the course of that time also, he should learn that he is under obligations of duty to himself—to his family—to his country, and to his God.

By the revised statutes of the State of New York, we are happy to learn that regulations similar to those which we would wish to see introduced into this State, have already been established. By those statutes it is ordained that if a person is convicted by a magistrate of intemperance, he is bound over to preserve order and abstain from criminal indulgences for one year; and in case of default of sureties, he shall be committed to jail. With the exception of the last clause, we would gladly see the same law enforced in this State; but we would have every person, when convicted of intemperance, unless he can find satisfactory sureties for his good conduct and sobriety, sent to an institution, furnished with whatever is necessary to promote his entire and permanent reformation. All which is respectfully submitted.

ELI TODD, MASON F. COGSWELL, SAMUEL B. WOODWARD, GEORGE SUMNER, HORATIO GRIDLEY,	}	Committee.
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The foregoing report having been read, was accepted by the convention, and the following resolutions were adopted.

1. *Resolved*, That in the opinion of this convention, it is expedient to establish in this State, an asylum for the reformation of Inebriates.

2. *Resolved*, That Docts. Knight, Simons, and H. Woodward, be a committee to present this subject to the consideration of the Legislature, and obtain an act of Incorporation.

3. *Resolved*, That a central committee of three members, be appointed for the purpose of forming an association and procuring funds for the establishment of such an asylum—and that said committee be requested to report their proceedings to the next convention of this Society.

4. *Resolved*, That there be a committee of two from each county, to cooperate with the central committee, in the prosecution of this object.

In accordance with the foregoing resolutions, Drs. *Eli Todd*, *S. B. Woodward*, and *Geo. Sumner*, were appointed a central committee, and the following gentlemen were appointed a committee of correspondence.

HORATIO GRIDLEY,	}	Hartford.
WM. S. PIERSON,		
WM. TULLY,	}	New Haven.
ISAAC JENNINGS,		
N. S. PERKINS,	}	New London.
WM. ROBINSON,		
SAMUEL SIMONS,	}	Fairfield.
JOHN GOULDING,		
DARIUS HUTCHINS,	}	Windham.
JOSIAH FULLER,		
LUTHER TICKNOR,	}	Litchfield,
NORMAN BULL,		
SAMUEL CARTER,	}	Middlesex.
THOMAS MINER,		
ELEAZER HUNT,	}	Tolland.
FREDERICK MORGAN,		

